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Ethiopia: Political and Security Impact of the Drought

An Intelligence Assessment

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April 1985

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Key Judgments

Information available as of 3 April 1985 was used in this report.

Ethiopia's continuing drought has presented the Mengistu regime with a human crisis of monumental proportions. Hundreds of thousands of peasants from Ethiopia's northern regions died during 1984, and at least as many are expected to die from famine-related causes this year, despite a massive outpouring of aid from the international community. Estimates of people at risk probably will rise by midyear. To the extent this occurs, more pressure will be placed on aid donors to increase the existing level of effort, which was itself based in part on earlier Ethiopian projections.

In our judgment, the crisis has not yet undermined Mengistu's military power base, and the stability of his regime does not appear seriously threatened thus far. Mengistu, nevertheless, is almost certainly mindful of the role famine played in the overthrow of his predecessor, Haile Selassie, and concerned over potential challenges to his rule. He has attempted to shield his vital military and urban constituencies from the full effects of the drought, while monitoring both closely for signs of discontent.

Mengistu, in fact, has attempted to use the famine to strengthen his position, especially in the longstanding conflict with the Eritrean and Tigrean insurgents. He relies on international donors to support the rural population in government-controlled areas of the north but vehemently opposes all efforts to provide aid to the drought victims in regions held by the insurgents. At the same time, he is trying to move nearly 1 million people from the contested northern regions to western and central Ethiopia. His stated rationale of relocating peasants from their devastated homeland to more fertile lowland areas has some merit, but his coercive tactics emphasize his political intent to undercut the dissidents' base of support and perhaps hasten collectivization of agriculture. The program, however, is a two-edged sword. While a secure resettlement program would hurt the rebel cause by disrupting its support base, the insurgents are likely to try to rally support by playing to the popular opposition stirred up by the prospect of forced resettlement.

Nowhere have the political and security aspects of the drought been more obvious than in the issue of cross-border feeding operations by international organizations. We believe Mengistu is prepared to use military force to disrupt the flow of food from Sudan to the rebel-held northern areas, as well as to stem the tide of refugees into Sudanese relief camps; indeed, both these flows have been exploited by the rebels to sustain their insurgency—by feeding their people and recruiting among the refugees. From the

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insurgents' viewpoint, any diversion of these flows would hamper their military capabilities. Despite the potential for both government- and rebel-initiated flareups of the fighting in the north, however, we believe the military situation there is unlikely to change dramatically.

So far, the worst famine-related problems have been limited to rural areas where Mengistu can play off conditions in government- and insurgent-controlled areas at little cost to his regime. The intensifying food crisis over the coming year, however, is likely to lead to worsening food shortages in the cities, forcing the government to adopt more stringent austerity measures that could affect Mengistu's political base. We believe the urban population probably will adjust stoically to increasing hardship, but, if civil disturbances occur, the regime almost certainly will turn to the army for support.

We believe that Mengistu probably will survive the crisis politically, sustained by a combination of Western humanitarian assistance and Soviet military and security aid and supported by his own military and security apparatus. Indeed, Mengistu will remain closely tied to the USSR, despite its tightfisted economic policies, since he perceives Moscow's military support as vital to his own survival. Although the United States and other Western donors have poured in enormous amounts of aid, relations between the West and Ethiopia are unlikely to improve significantly. In the case of the United States, tensions with the regime over aid to the north almost certainly will increase and are likely to lead to a further deterioration in relations. Mengistu views the United States as his main threat and is convinced that Washington not only directly supports the rebels, but also encourages similar assistance to them by Sudan and Somalia.

Despite Moscow's broad political-military commitment to the Marxist Mengistu regime, the Soviets have not come forward with significant new economic assistance to Ethiopia, probably because they believe Western willingness to foot the bill will not alter Ethiopia's military and political dependence on Moscow. The minimal Soviet aid—primarily in the transport sector and in support of the resettlement program—has received extensive publicity in Ethiopia. We believe the Soviets harbor some concern that Western generosity could undermine their position, and are encouraging Mengistu's deep suspicions of US motives in supplying aid.

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If, however, Mengistu is overthrown, instability surrounding the seating of a new government could offer some opportunity for improving relations with the United States, particularly as the successor regime would struggle with the same intractable economic problems. The Soviets would move quickly to restore their position, however; and any effort to strengthen ties with Washington will be limited by the extent to which the government in power believes that continued military and security ties to the USSR are vital to its own survival.

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Ethiopia: Political and Security Impact of the Drought

Introduction

The Marxist regime in Ethiopia faces growing pressures from the worst drought and famine in decades. Hundreds of thousands of peasants died from famine-related causes in 1984, and, given the poor harvest prospects, conditions almost certainly will worsen in 1985. The northern regions, (see map following text) the site of longstanding insurgencies,[1] thus far have borne the brunt of the tragedy and have become the focus of international attention—factors that have both complicated Mengistu's prosecution of the war and created opportunities to weaken insurgent support. Famine-induced migration has worsened already-strained relations with neighboring states, and Mengistu's increasing dependence on Western—particularly US—humanitarian assistance has raised political problems for a regime that is deeply distrustful of the United States and closely allied with the Soviet Union. The next six months pose difficult challenges to Mengistu as he attempts to placate the military and the potentially volatile urban population, hitherto largely protected from the famine

Scope of the Present Crisis

Recurrent drought has plagued Ethiopia in recent years, particularly in the strife-torn northern provinces, which traditionally have not produced enough food to feed their population. While the specter of hunger is always present, the failure of the midyear rains in 1984 aggravated Ethiopia's chronically precarious food situation and created famine conditions in a large part of the country. Estimates by international observers of the people threatened with death by starvation and related causes vary from 7.7 million

Misguided Policy Initiatives

Counterproductive government policies, in our judgment, have exacerbated the problems of drought, deforestation, soil degradation, rapid population growth, and primitive farming techniques that traditionally have made Ethiopia susceptible to famine. By emphasizing collectivized agriculture and state-run farms and by keeping food prices low in order to maintain urban support, the Mengistu regime has reduced incentives for private farming. State farms—mainly used to grow corn and wheat for urban consumers and cotton and sugar for export—have failed to pick up the slack. Poor management, lack of skilled personnel, and equipment breakdowns have limited output, and most state farms have been financially unsuccessful. Moreover, transportation difficulties, an inefficient marketing system, and inadequate storage facilities have further hampered productivity.

Ethiopia, which until the early 1970s grew most of its own food, has become increasingly unable to feed itself. As a result, dependence on food imports—mostly aid from Western governments, private voluntary organizations, and multilateral organizations, rather than commercial purchases—has grown. Stagnating coffee production—in part caused by Addis Ababa's low producer prices—has limited the amount of foreign exchange available for even minimal commercial food purchases. The regime's policies also have compounded budget problems because of the need to cover the operating costs of inefficient state-run enterprises and maintain urban food subsidies. Finally, policies have contributed to increased migration to the cities, which has caused rural labor shortages, increasing urban food demand, and strains on the government's ambitious but overburdened social services

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to 9 million.[2] The reports that even Ethiopian Government estimates—consistently lower than international donor projections of people at risk—have continued to climb and are likely to rise further by midyear.

According to Ethiopian Government estimates, more than 80 percent of those affected by the famine live in the north. Many of these people are now in or moving toward the cities, towns, and feeding stations of the northern provinces that are under the control of the Mengistu regime, and a large number are crossing the border into relief camps in Sudan, according to the As many as 2-3 million, however, have remained in insurgent-controlled territory. Food supply is particularly critical in the northern provinces of Eritrea and Tigray and in Welo, northern Shewa, and parts of Gonder. (C NF)

reports that relief efforts in the north have been seriously hampered as road transport throughout the region is vulnerable to attack from both government and insurgent forces. Authorized deliveries of supplies to government-controlled population centers and feeding camps are frequently delayed until large armed convoys are formed; even then, vehicles can operate only during daylight hours. On the other hand, cross-border international relief efforts into insurgent-held areas, as well as insurgent food and refugee convoys, must move at night to avoid government air attacks.

The northern provinces are not, however, the only areas affected; the drought also has spread southward. Harerge in southeastern Ethiopia is especially hard hit, Conditions apparently are not yet as bad in southern Shewa, Bale, Gamo Gofa, and Sidamo, but the believes they are likely to worsen. A drought assessment team sent by to this area last October found that rainfall, crop production, and food and livestock supplies were below normal and that food aid soon would be needed. Assistance to the southern regions has been lagging, however, because donors have been concentrating on the hard-hit north.

The spreading drought and wandering refugees have made it especially difficult to determine the level of food shortfalls. In December 1984, Ethiopia's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC)—the government organization monitoring the crisis—announced that food requirements for 1985 would be 1.3 million metric tons and that the country also needs logistic support, clothing, shelter, and medicine. A higher estimate appears more likely, however, as the crisis intensifies.

North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Japan have responded by mounting a massive relief effort. Approximately 220,000 metric tons of relief aid were delivered between October and December 1984, and foreign donors have pledged 718,000 metric tons for 1985, according to World Food Program statistics in February. Ethiopia's East European and Soviet allies have concentrated their response on boosting the capacity of the transport sector. UN officials have publicly expressed their belief that international food assistance will meet Ethiopia's stated needs; we disagree, however, and expect—on the basis of the rising population at risk—a significant shortfall between projected aid levels and actual requirements.

As far as the internal logistics are concerned, the United States reached an agreement with the Government of Ethiopia last fall that lets the RRC handle US Government assistance directly. In addition, large amounts of food relief are being distributed by the FAO's World Food Program and through nongovernmental organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children Federation, Lutheran World Federation, Church World Services, World Vision, and Oxfam.

Mengistu's Strategy

Mengistu's leadership skills clearly will be severely tested over the coming year by the drought-induced crisis. Although we believe the stability of the government is not immediately threatened, Mengistu almost

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certainly is concerned over potential challenges to his rule and is mindful that a similar crisis contributed to the ouster of Haile Selassie in 1974. As a result, we expect him to attempt to shield important constituencies—particularly the military and the potentially volatile urban population—from the full effects of famine by allocating scarce resources and, if necessary, diverting famine relief supplies. This is not to say the urban areas will go unscathed. The regime is implementing—probably reluctantly—some austerity measures that will affect the cities. Even so, most of the burden will fall on the countryside where Addis Ababa is content to let international relief efforts take care of the politically less influential rural population and thus help prevent refugees from further burdening urban areas. In our judgment, the government also will continue to focus its energies on a massive rural resettlement program designed to expand Addis Ababa's control over the countryside and to advance agricultural collectivization.

The Military

Ethiopia's 200,000-strong army plays a pervasive role in running the country and is the backbone of Mengistu's support. reports that the armed forces dominate the new Ethiopian Workers Party, formed last September ostensibly to lay the groundwork for a Communist society, and officers loyal to Mengistu hold most key senior government positions. Nevertheless, military morale is low because of the prolonged conflict in the north and the inability of government troops to win major victories.

Given the vital importance of military support, the regime's priority almost certainly is to ensure the army's loyalty by protecting it from food shortages. Soldiers and their families receive rations of basic foodstuffs from the government, including commodities no longer available to civilians in the capital, . We believe, that the military gets first crack at some goods purchased commercially by the regime and some agricultural commodities supplied by farmers and state farms to meet government quotas.

We believe Mengistu will continue to placate the army at the expense of other sectors of the population. Even so, a senior Ethiopian official recently told personnel that the government probably will have difficulty providing sufficient food to the army later this year as available stocks are exhausted.

Famine and the Fall of Haile Selassie

Many observers have noted that the Mengistu regime faces a famine similar to that which contributed in 1974 to the downfall, after 44 years in power, of Emperor Haile Selassie. Despite some parallels, however, including the current food crisis, we believe other factors—largely absent in Ethiopia today—were more important.

The Ethiopian revolution occurred as modernization processes were accelerating, creating pressures that the conservative monarch could not contain. The Arab-Israeli war of 1973 led to a sharp rise in petroleum prices beyond Ethiopia's ability to pay. In addition, the illness of the crown prince raised public uncertainly about the aging Emperor's successor.

The revolution itself began in January 1974 as an army mutiny at Negele over poor food and water. Military mutinies over issues of low pay and living conditions spread to other troops in the Ogaden, Eritrea, and eventually Addis Ababa itself. At the same time, opposition to fuel price increases, low salaries, and curriculum changes throughout the educational system set the stage for repeated confrontations between numerous pressure groups and the government. In addition, evidence that the regime was suppressing news of the severe famine in the northern highlands—which by the end of 1973 had claimed between 100,000 and 300,000 lives in only two of the hardest hit regions, Tigray and Welo—led to severe criticism from Ethiopians both inside and outside the government. Teachers, students, workers, and eventually soldiers—all demanding higher pay and better working conditions—also adopted other causes such as land reform and famine relief and finally insisted on a new political system. Haile Selassie proved unable to reassert his control and was deposed in September 1974.

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International observers have been unable to substantiate frequent rumors that relief aid is being diverted to the military, but Mengistu almost certainly would authorize the military to siphon off food aid covertly if shortages became critical.

Mengistu also will continue to rely on demonstrations of Soviet support to ensure his control of the military. High-level Soviet military officials periodically visit Ethiopia, and Soviet military advisers are attached to each Ethiopian division headquarters and to almost all brigades. Arms shipments have continued to arrive during the famine crisis, underlining Moscow's commitment as the regime's primary military backer.

In the event that dissatisfaction emerges despite Mengistu's efforts to ensure the loyalty of the military, we believe he will not hesitate to use more repressive measures. Mengistu and his commanders are certainly sensitive to the threat that an angry, frustrated, or ambitious military poses to the regime and make extensive use of the network of political commissars throughout the armed forces to detect signs of dissent. While the regime has attempted to defuse resentment by meeting some of the army's demands in the past—such as increasing pay and reducing the number of Cuban troops in Ethiopia—it has also been quick to arrest and execute suspected troublemakers to avert serious disorder.

The Urban Population

While Mengistu's strategy for dealing with the adverse political consequences of the food shortages focuses on the military, he also appears concerned with isolating the potentially restive urban population from the crisis. Deteriorating economic conditions, the protracted northern conflict, and the increasing Soviet role in Ethiopia already have contributed to eroding urban popular support for Mengistu. We believe, however, that the government's attempts to provide adequate food supplies for the cities, the regime's pervasive security apparatus, and the public's memory of the bloody days of the "red terror" in 1977-78 will continue to deter urban unrest.

In its continuing efforts to insulate the cities from the effects of famine, the regime has even used scarce foreign exchange to buy food for urban distribution and has asked the United States for a loan of food under the US PL 480 Title I program for this purpose. Addis Ababa recently arranged to buy 100,000 metric tons of wheat from France for urban consumption this year. In addition, troops have been used to prevent refugees from entering Addis Ababa, and those few that straggle into the capital are taken promptly to camps outside the city. The government-controlled media occasionally report on efforts to combat the drought and on foreign relief contributions---particularly from the Soviet Bloc—but have not revealed the actual magnitude of the crisis. Even when government officials are pictured visiting refugee camps, the refugees themselves are never shown.

We believe, however, that Mengistu will lose ground in his effort to shelter the urban population. Already last fall, it was publicly announced that the authority of the *kebeles* (neighborhood associations to which all urban Ethiopians belong) was being expanded, probably in expectation of distribution problems. The regime closed private bakeries in November and turned bread sales over to the *kebeles*, making receipt of the bread ration dependent on attendance records at compulsory political meetings. In January, the *kebeles* also assumed responsibility for the distribution of fruits and vegetables to urban residents. Even so, reports that some food shortages already have occurred, and in mid-February Mengistu announced further austerity measures that clearly would affect city dwellers. Workers are to be assessed a national drought relief tax equaling one month's pay, and all Ethiopians are supposed to serve tours at relief shelters and resettlement camps. In addition, the regime announced that, to limit the drawdown of critical foreign exchange, it was going to cut imports, including automobiles, luxury goods, and textiles and impose petroleum rationing—all steps that affect the cities most directly.

[1] During the government's successful struggle to consolidate its power in 1977-78, it arrested and killed thousands of its civilian opponents, effectively breaking the back of its internal political opposition, according to Western observers.

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The Rural Population

Mengistu's strategy for dealing with those most directly affected by the famine—the rural population—appears to us aimed more at using the crisis to weaken the insurgencies than at meeting the food needs of starving peasants. The regime has established feeding centers at major cities and towns under its control in the north, but has refused to authorize the movement of relief supplies to insurgent-held areas and has hindered international efforts to reach those most at risk. We believe Addis Ababa's promise—made during the March UN Conference on the Emergency Economic Situation in Africa—to expand feeding in the north is little more than a ploy to quiet Western donor criticism of government famine policy. In addition, the government gave priority to Soviet ships unloading military cargo at least twice in January at the expense of Western relief shipments.

After agreeing last fall to allow Western donors to provide food aid to all parts of the country, Addis Ababa more recently has made strong protests to the United States over private donors' relief shipments into insurgent-held territory from Sudan and has implied it could not guarantee the safety of international relief workers in the region. In January, security forces boarded at least three ships in Ethiopian ports to seize relief shipments destined for the cross-border effort, and Mengistu personally—and publicly—rejected a plea to allow international donors to operate in insurgent-held areas. On the basis of their public statements we believe the Ethiopians are convinced that such assistance is intended to strengthen the regime's enemies and further weaken its position in the north.

Mengistu has publicly rejected repeated calls for a "food truce." The regime clearly is prepared to use force, including airstrikes, to keep supplies from reaching insurgent areas and to disrupt refugee flows to Sudan, which has long provided safehaven and logistic routes for the rebels. Indeed, several air strikes have already been reported. The Ethiopian Air Force last November strafed a large group of refugees moving toward the Sudanese border in the company of a small group of armed insurgents and, according to international relief workers, in March attacked up to 10 transit centers along the major refugee route.

Mengistu's Resettlement Plan

The regime continues to implement its massive resettlement plan to move nearly 1 million northerners to more fertile areas in western and southwestern parts of the country by the end of 1985. Under the program—an expanson of a scheme from the late 1970s—the government already has moved approximately 250,000 people since November, according to numerous press, Ethiopian, and foreign donor reports. The government has touted the program as a means of breaking the cycle of famine and drought in the north, an area most observers agree is unable to feed its population. In our judgment, Addis Ababa also believes that moving peasants from the combat areas will cut deeply into the direct support provided to the insurgency, as well as pressing the resettled farmers to establish collective farms and peasant associations that are used by the government as a means of political and economic control. reports that over 2,000 party members have been sent to organize the new settlements.

Mengistu's continuing emphasis on the relocation effort is likely to alienate further the rural population, both those being moved and those having to accept new arrivals. For example, the new settlers, mostly Amharas and Tigreans, have long been resented as colonizers by the Oromo inhabitants of the southern region. In addition to rekindling ethnic tensions, the relocation scheme will sharpen competition for water as the government appropriates traditional grazing lands for the northerners.

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While Mengistu is apparently trying to weaken the insurgencies by interfering with relief efforts, other actions of his may inadvertently help the insurgent

The northern insurgent organizations, for their part, have also been using the famine and relief efforts for their own purposes. The Relief Society of Tigray (REST), an arm of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), has helped move large numbers of refugees to Sudan—at least 120,000 to 130,000 according to US Embassy sources in Sudan. The TPLF uses the refugee camps to provide sanctuary, medical care, food, and money to its fighters and their families—some of whom work in the camps— Many send small sums and food home, and some "drought victims" return to Ethiopia periodically with supplies. Some funds that insurgent organizations are raising for relief operations, as a result of increased world publicity, are almost certainly being diverted for military purposes. Moreover, the guerrillas probably have recruited additional troops from among victims of the famine and as a result of their control of the refugee camps in Sudan. The rebels' ability to absorb the new recruits, however, will continue to be restricted by a shortage of weapons and other military supplies. Their military activities also are hampered by the need to divert troops to guard refugee convoys and deliver food supplies within Ethiopia. International relief officials now fear that the TPLF is hindering movement of refugees to government-controlled areas to induce more Tigreans to flee to Sudan

Foreign Relations

Just as Mengistu's domestic strategy for dealing with Ethiopia's drought and famine goes well beyond simply meeting the food needs for the populace, so, too, do Ethiopia's foreign relations. Mengistu appears to be adeptly using Western humanitarian gestures to supply needed food for a country unwilling to offer a political quid pro quo. At the same time, he heaps praise on Moscow for an occasional bagatelle to acknowledge Ethiopia's political and military dependence.

The USSR and Eastern Europe

Despite Moscow's close relationship with the Mengistu regime, Soviet food deliveries last year were limited to 10,000 tons of rice—equal to the amount given in 1983, Increases in Soviet economic aid since the onset of the present crisis have been largely in the transport sector. the Soviets have so far delivered 300 trucks, 24 transport aircraft, and 24 helicopters—equipment that can be used not only for food delivery but also for military purposes. The trucks and aircraft are being employed primarily in the resettlement program, ports Moscow has demanded that Addis Ababa pay for Soviet fuel and personnel expenses incurred in transporting relief supplies. The Soviets also supplied a mobile hospital and 150 medical personnel in response to Mengistu's plea for aid during a sudden trip to Moscow last December. East European countries—East Germany and Bulgaria—have provided some relief aid, including airlift assistance. For its part, Cuba has limited its assistance largely to the military sector, despite Mengistu's request for famine relief during his visit to Havana in December, The Cubans promised to send 20,000 tons of sugar and to increase the number of Cuban doctors but explained they were constrained by their own economic difficulties from doing more.

Despite its low level of food aid, Moscow has attempted to extract maximum publicity from its minimal relief activities in Ethiopia, undoubtedly hoping to boost its credibility as a reliable supporter of client states and to detract from Western relief efforts.

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Soviet-Ethiopian Ties

Mengistu's alliance with Moscow provides him the military equipment and advisory support essential to combat the northern insurgents and counter Somali irredentism. He almost certainly sees no alternative source of supply. We believe that Mengistu also looks to the Soviet Union as a model for building a new society to bridge the country's traditional ethnic divisions and transform the economic social and political order and to justify total political control by a small self-appointed leadership group.

For its part, Moscow values its relationship with Mengistu because it provides access to naval facilities near the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, which enhances Soviet capability to project air and naval power in the region and beyond. Moreover, the Soviets probably view Ethiopia as a potential springboard from which to support or promote other leftist movements in Africa.

Moscow has provided the Mengistu regime with over $3 billion worth of military assistance—

Despite Addis Ababa's heavy dependence on Moscow, longstanding differences persist in several areas, including strategy for resolving the Eritrean insurgency and the composition of the official (Marxist-Leninist) Ethiopian Workers Party, established last fall. The Soviets wanted a party dominated by civilians—because it might have been an easier one to influence—rather than by armed forces personnel, as was engineered by Mengistu.

Mengistu—although probably disappointed over the lukewarm Soviet response to his country's plight—has publicly heaped praise on the Soviets and their allies, while largely ignoring Western relief efforts. reports that each donation from Moscow and its allies is publicized three times—at the time of commitment, on delivery, and again at distribution.

We believe, however, the Soviets are at least somewhat concerned that Western generosity could weaken their position in Ethiopia.

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Relations With the West

Although Ethiopia has accepted massive amounts of Western, particularly US, famine assistance, relations between the Mengistu regime and the West have not improved significantly and, indeed, appear to be deteriorating over US efforts to ensure relief for all of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa recently threatened to break relations with the United States if Washington follows through on its plans to increase substantially relief operations from Sudan to the northern, mostly rebel-held, regions of Ethiopia. Mengistu and other key government officials, view the United States as the main threat to its Marxist revolution and the driving force behind efforts to subvert it. Mengistu and his key advisers believe Washington already aids insurgent groups directly, uses relief efforts to channel additional aid to the rebels, and encourages Sudan and Somalia to assist them.

Mengistu appears less hostile toward most other Western countries and probably does not view them as a direct threat to Ethiopia. Nevertheless, according to the US Embassy, the government continues to place tight limits on Western donor access—particularly in the contested regions of the north—and has threatened to patrol the Bab el Mandeb strait to interdict foreign ships carrying supplies destined for transshipment to rebel-held areas. In addition, while the regime has afforded some publicity to international relief efforts, it has publicly charged that the current crisis is the result of the inadequate response from donor countries to Addis Ababa's earlier warnings about the seriousness of the drought. While the government is obstructing Western relief efforts in the north, Western donors and international donor organizations operating in Ethiopia have been approached by government officials to aid the resettlement program. Thus far, however, only the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization, the Catholic Church, and Australia have agreed, although other Western donors, such as Canada, Norway, and West Germany, are considering assistance for those already resettled.

Neighboring States

The political, economic, and military spillover of the consequences of the Ethiopian drought means that the country's neighbors face severe refugee problems in addition to their own food shortages. This is increasing bilateral tensions and, we believe, could threaten stability in the Horn.

Relations between Ethiopia and Sudan have long been strained, mainly over the support each provides for the other's insurgency. The Eritrean and Tigrean rebels have their headquarters in Khartoum and use Sudanese territory for supply routes into areas they control inside Ethiopia, according to several reliable sources. Mengistu recently condemned publicly Sudan and other Arab states—particularly Saudi Arabia—for aiding the insurgents, following the announcement in Khartoum in January of the merger of three minor Eritrean dissident groups. we believe Sudan provides only limited aid to the rebels, but Mengistu's public statements suggest he is convinced that aid to the insurgents from the US-backed government in Khartoum and Sudan's Arab friends is responsible for the failure of his northern military campaigns. In turn, Addis Ababa, in close cooperation with Libya, supplies aid and training to Sudanese dissidents and allows them to operate against southern Sudan from bases in southwestern Ethiopia, according to press sources.

The enormous new influx of Ethiopian refugees—mainly from Eritrea and Tigray—into Sudan over the past six months will strain relations further, in our view. Over a quarter of a million Ethiopian refugees have converged on Sudan since late 1984, and UN workers estimate that up to 3,000 people cross the border daily. Mengistu has publicly expressed concern that the refugee camps in Sudan offer fertile ground for rebel recruitment and that cross-border relief efforts are really intended to aid the rebel forces. The government threatened in January to take action against countries involved in "hostile and conspiratorial acts" against Ethiopia and has said it would attack any rebel installation or activity it could locate and target. We believe Addis Ababa is likely to take military action to end relief efforts to the rebel-held areas, particularly when cross-border programs are increased.

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The huge refugee population has increased the burden on the fragile Sudanese regime, which has drought and famine problems of its own and a growing insurgency in the south. The influx of some 700,000 Ethiopians and numerous other nationalities, according to US State Department estimates, is seriously straining Sudan's already overburdened relief organizations; [redacted] in Khartoum indicates that shortages of water, lack of proper sanitation and housing, and disease are contributing to an alarmingly high death rate in the relief camps. President Nimeiri has complained to US officials that Sudan cannot continue to accept massive numbers of new refugees and has called for international efforts to stem the flows from Ethiopia and Chad. The US Embassy in Khartoum estimates that by this summer, if the influx continues unabated, almost a million refugees will compete with 4 million hungry Sudanese for a decreasing supply of food and water, a competition for scarce resources that can only stimulate further unrest in Sudan. [redacted]

Ethiopia's other neighbors also face refugee problems and food shortages that could threaten regional stability. [redacted] Addis Ababa still regards Somali forces as a military threat and believes US assistance encourages Mogadishu's designs on the Ogaden. While many refugees from the 1978 Ogaden war and the 1982 drought were repatriated to Ethiopia from Djibouti and Somalia over the past year, Mogadishu and Djibouti fear that many of these people will return and tax overburdened facilities. [redacted] Serious financial problems plague both countries, while Somalia also faces growing Ethiopian-supported dissident activities in the north. Kenya, although not threatened with a similar refugee influx, fears that Addis Ababa's domestic resettlement program might shift a potentially troublesome population close to its border and increase regional tensions, [redacted]

Prospects and Implications

We agree with most observers that Ethiopia's food crisis is likely to worsen over the coming year. [redacted] even if normal rains do return in 1985, hundreds of thousands more people could die this year and that diseases such as measles and cholera will spread. Even if the drought ends, harvests probably will be small for some time because of labor migration away from agricultural regions, the lack of agricultural inputs, and continuing marketing and transport problems. Moreover, Addis Ababa faces serious difficulties in making the newly resettled peasants quickly productive and is unlikely to change its generally counterproductive socialist agricultural policies. [redacted]

The regime is likely to face worsening food shortages in the cities that could spark urban unrest despite government price controls and the expansion of authority over food distribution. In our judgment, the regime will be able to provide some food but will have to rely increasingly on the *kebeles*—already involved in every aspect of urban life—to maintain order. Mengistu may be forced to call for further austerity in urban areas—and to a lesser extent by the military—under the pretense of solidarity with the famine-stricken rural population. [redacted]

In our judgment, the deepening food crisis also may intensify the conflict in the north. We believe that Addis Ababa may conclude that the famine and resulting diversion of insurgent resources to relief efforts have increased the vulnerability of the rebels. Mengistu may launch his long-postponed northern offensive in the hopes of winning significant victories that would enhance morale in the military and deflect attention from the growing food crisis [redacted]

The insurgents, for their part, are likely to resist strongly in order to safeguard their access to relief supplies, as well as to obstruct government programs—particularly resettlement—aimed at destroying their base of support. As Addis Ababa increases pressure on the rebels, and as each side maneuvers to blame the famine crisis on the other and publicize its own relief efforts to win public support, we believe that the potential for bitter fighting in the north will rise. Additionally, the risk to noncombatants—including foreign relief workers—in the region is bound to grow, particularly if Mengistu carries out his threat to attack unauthorized relief efforts, that is, relief to rebel-held areas [redacted]

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Despite the likelihood of intensified fighting, we believe the military situation in the north is unlikely to change dramatically. Even if a government offensive were successful, which we think is unlikely because of inadequate training, poor logistics, and low morale, the insurgents would not be defeated. The effects of the resettlement program, in our judgment, will be only temporary, as over time many of those moved probably will filter back into the northern regions from the resettlement areas, in addition to returning refugees from Sudan. Moreover, the resettlement program could backfire on the government by spreading the insurgencies into new regions.

Over the long run—and in the absence of major changes in the regime's economic policies—we believe Ethiopia will suffer recurrent famines resulting from periodic droughts. Although recurring food crises will force Mengistu to rely on Western humanitarian assistance to survive, we doubt that Western generosity will yield significant political gains in Addis Ababa. Mengistu, in our view, will remain closely tied to the USSR, despite its tightfisted economic aid policies, since Moscow's military support is vital to his own survival.

On the political front, we believe Mengistu probably will weather the current crisis without serious opposition, even though we expect growing discontent throughout Ethiopian society. The regime will continue to monitor the military closely for signs of dissent and, in our judgment, will move quickly and effectively against potential troublemakers. Even if mounting food shortages lead to disorder in the capital, the *kebeles* and the army probably could maintain order, at least initially. Moscow is likely to continue its unwavering support of the Mengistu regime and, along with the Cubans, probably would supply additional security assistance to contain any serious threat to the regime.

Under these circumstances, we see scant prospect for a significant improvement in Ethiopia's relations with Washington—at least as long as Mengistu remains in power. Relations between the two countries are likely to remain rocky as Washington continues to criticize regime policies, including Addis Ababa's commitment to resettlement and its refusal to allow aid to reach insurgent areas. Ethiopian attacks on cross-border relief convoys no doubt would aggravate tensions, particularly if any foreign personnel were injured or killed. Moreover, Mengistu may attempt to use the United States as a scapegoat for his failed policies as the famine situation worsens. In our judgment, however, Ethiopia is unlikely to carry out its threat to break relations with the United States over increased cross-border operations, because of its dependence on Western economic and humanitarian aid. Addis Ababa might, nonetheless, expel some US Embassy officials to indicate its displeasure.

Ethiopia Without Mengistu

In our judgment, despite increasing coup rumors in Addis Ababa, it is unlikely that Mengistu will be overthrown, although certain events could converge to precipitate a successful coup. If prolonged civil disorder accompanied major government military defeats in the north, Mengistu would lose credibility as a leader and be more susceptible to coup attempts. While a successor regime probably also would be pro-Soviet, the instability in the country before a new government could consolidate its power would offer some opportunity for improved relations with the United States. Nevertheless, as long as Addis Ababa views the northern insurgencies as a serious threat, it will be unlikely to loosen its ties to the USSR.

Since Mengistu has already moved against any obvious "heirs apparent," we believe that a new leader almost certainly would be selected through a power struggle within the military, possibly among Mengistu's inner circle. While detailed information about this group is limited, the army's actions to date suggest that a successor regime most likely would remain dependent on the USSR for security assistance, fearing that any weakening of Ethiopian military power could encourage both the insurgents and Somalia to increase their pressure.

Barring the unexpected emergence of a Sadat-type leader, we believe it unlikely that a successor regime would make major changes in Ethiopia's leftist, pro-Soviet orientation. The country's military dependence

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on the USSR, as well as its intractable economic and political problems, point to continuing links with the Soviet Bloc for security purposes. Only reduced tensions in the north—due to military victory or the prospect for a negotiated settlement—are likely to lead to meaningful efforts by a successor regime to lessen military dependence on Moscow. In this event, the Soviets almost certainly would move quickly to restore their position and probably would encourage and support pro-Soviet elements in the military in a countercoup.

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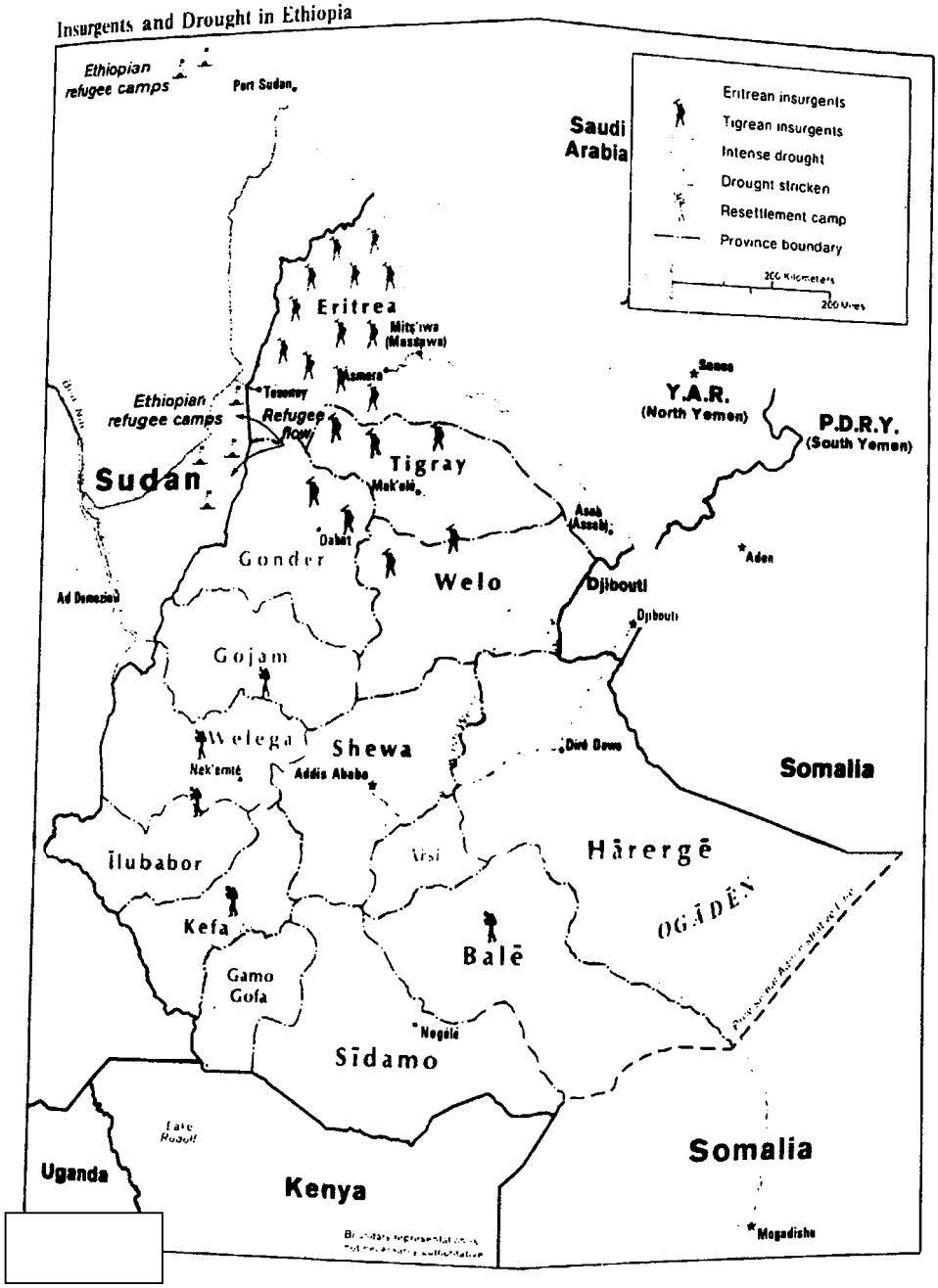
Insurgents and Drought in Ethiopia



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